

Athlete Profile (National)



Jim Milliken – Competition is the Key!

Jim Milliken, a 60-year-old Army veteran from South Bend, Ind., says, “It’s definitely the competition that got me hooked on the National Veterans Wheelchair Games. I always look forward to coming to this event because of the large number of athletes and the tremendous spirit you feel being a competitor here.”

While serving in Vietnam, Milliken was out on patrol when a huge explosion went off behind him. Along with Milliken, two fellow soldiers were also severely injured. He was rushed to surgery immediately, where doctors amputated both his right leg above the knee and his left leg below the knee.

Despite such serious physical and emotional injuries, Milliken attributes wheelchair sports to his active lifestyle since his injury in Vietnam. “I have been competing in wheelchair sports for 30 years,” he says. “After my injury, it was wheelchair sports that got me out and active again. It made a big difference in my rehabilitation and my life in general.”

Although winning is a goal for many wheelchair athletes competing in these Games, Milliken has certainly enjoyed his own share of the fame. An accomplished athlete, in 1988 he was selected to be a part of the Paralympic swim team in Seoul, Korea. “Winning doesn’t mean that I always beat all my competitors,” he said. “It sometimes just means that I beat my personal best swim times. If I beat the timing goals I set but someone else wins the race, then I’m still happy with myself.” At the 2006 National Veterans Wheelchair Games in Anchorage, Alaska, he took home four gold medals in swimming and plans to bring back a few more this year.

In his free time, Milliken plays a little golf, gardens and swims about three times each week at his local YMCA. As a member of a YMCA swim team, he competes in some able-bodied meets and often against people nearly half his age. He speaks fondly of these experiences, but he really enjoys competing in the national events with other veterans. “It’s more fun to participate in events when it’s all veterans who went through the same things together,” Milliken says.

This will be Jim Milliken’s 15th year competing in the National Veterans Wheelchair Games. His advice for newcomers is simple. “Enter lots of different events and try new things. See what you enjoy and what you excel at.” Milliken heeds his own advice and this year has added the wheelchair curling and trapshooting exhibitions to his event itinerary. When it comes to winning though, this veteran is sure to swim his way to victory once again.